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ABSTRACT

The relationship between occupational status projections and subsequent occupational attainment is analyzed through a comparison of the occupational aspirations and expectations of 614 tenth grade students in 1966, and their occupational status attainment in 1972. Aspirations, expectations, and attainment were the variables measured, using the Duncan Socioeconomic Index of Occupations, with respondents classified according to race, sex, and residence. Analysis focused on two questions: "(1) do occupational aspirations and expectations of youth reflect different levels of realism in the matter of occupational choice when compared with occupational attainment, and (2) do occupational aspirations and expectations become more realistic through time, i.e. from adolescence to young adulthood." In answer to the first question it was found that neither aspirations nor expectations reflected a high level of realism regarding occupational choice, with occupational aspirations less realistic than expectations. Race, sex, and residence controls did not alter the findings. In answer to the second question, it was found that for the sample as a whole, occupational aspirations did not change and occupational expectations decreased, although for women both remained the same. Females showed a higher 1972 occupational attainment score than males, indicating more realistic occupational status projections. (Author/LH)

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OCCUPATIONAL STATUS PROJECTIONS DURING HIGH SCHOOL AND POST-HIGH SCHOOL AND FULL-TIME WORK EXPERIENCE

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In this report we focus on two questions: (1) do occupational aspirations and expectations of youth reflect different levels of realism in the matter of occupational choice when compared with occupational attainment, and (2) do occupational aspirations and expectations become more realistic through time, i.e. from adolescence to young adulthood.

Previous research has indicated that aspirations and expectations should not be viewed as identical (Kuvlesky and Bealer, 1966:269-276; Haller, Otto, Meier, and Ohlendorf, 1974:114). Aspirations, for some students of occupational choice, represent or reflect "ideal goals" while the other, expectations, represent or reflect "action goals" (Haller and Miller, 1963:8). Taylor (1968:198) found no evidence that either aspirations or expectations of adolescents are rational projections based on knowledge of the occupational structure.

Few studies have examined relationships between occupational status projections and subsequent occupational attainment.[1] Still fewer have utilized an objective measure of realism as a basis of ascertaining whether such projections become more realistic through time. Sollie and Lightsey (1974) examined relationships between occupational aspirations and subsequent occupational attainment of 614 young people and found that for many of the subsamples (respondents classified according to race, sex and residence) differences between aspirations and attainment varied considerably.

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[1]Kuvlesky and Bealer (1967:32) reported they were able to find only six studies that dealt with this question.

The same 614 respondents are examined in this report to determine if (1) their aspirations and expectations, expressed when they were tenth grade students in 1966, were significantly different, and (2) their occupational status projections changed significantly from 1966 to 1972 when they had achieved full-time employment status.

ANALYSES

The Duncan Socioeconomic Index of Occupations was used as an operational definition of occupational status projections and attainment. This index has a maximum score of 96; with 614 respondents, therefore, the maximum total score possible for all three variables was 58,944.

It was not expected that our respondents would achieve maximum possible scores on aspirations, expectations or attainment. On the contrary, given ideological and other differences among youth as well as findings of previous research, we expected projections and attainment to vary and to fall below the maximum possible score. We also expected, based on Ginsberg's Developmental Theory, that projections would change through time, reflecting new influences, including a more rational assessment of parameters of the American occupational structure.

Computations supported our expectations. In 1966 our respondents achieved the following scores:[2] Aspirations - 30,332

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[2]Variations in N's resulted from elimination of housewive and no response and non-codable replies.

($\bar{M}$ = 50.3 for 603 respondents); Expectations - 25,032 ($\bar{M}$ = 46.0 for 544 respondents). Their 1972 attainment score was 17,577 ($\bar{M}$ = 30.4 for 579 respondents).

Using attainment as our measure of realism, it is apparent that neither aspirations nor expectations reflected a high level of realism in the matter of occupational choice; both were substantially higher than the attainment score.[3] Our expectation that occupational aspirations would be less realistic than occupational expectations was also confirmed.

At this point in our analysis, however, we were more interested in the question of whether the difference between aspirations and expectations was a significant difference. To test the null hypothesis of no difference we utilized the Z test of difference between proportions, and observed that the difference was not significant. The total attainment score was 31 percent of the theoretically possible high score. Total aspiration and expectation scores were 52 and 48 percent respectively of the theoretically possible high score.

Results of our analysis for the sample as a whole agreed with Stephenson's (1957:211) finding that youth do differentiate

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[3]It is recognized that attainment in 1972 (six years after the respondents identified their aspirations and expectations and four years after they completed or should have completed high school) is a measure of early attainment, and that the gaps between projections and attainment might decrease through time. We do not assume that occupational status crystallization has occurred for all our respondents, but we take the position that without additional formal education, occupational mobility would be primarily within categories rather than from one level to another. See Morris and Murphy (1959, 231-239) for a discussion of occupational mobility.

between aspirations and expectations, even though the difference is not statistically significant. They also agree with Taylor's (1968:198) conclusion that aspirations and expectations are not realistic projections in relation to the matter of occupational choice.

Neither race, sex nor residence, when introduced as controls, altered the nature of the relationship observed for the sample as a whole. We did observe, however, when these were controlled simultaneously, that mean expectation scores for five of the resulting subgroups were higher than their mean aspiration scores.[4] Four of these subgroups were blacks.

We turned our attention next to the second question posed for this report: do occupational aspirations and expectations become more realistic through time. According to developmental theory, occupational status projections should change through time, becoming, according to our expectation, more realistic.

Computations of 1966 and 1972 mean scores yielded results contrary to what was expected. The 1966 mean aspiration score for the sample as a whole was 50.3, but in 1972 the mean score was 51.5. Although the Z test (computed on standardized scores) indicated that the difference was not significant, the fact that aspirations for the sample as a whole did not decrease through time is contrary to what was expected.

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[4]Sixteen subgroups resulted when race, sex and residence were controlled simultaneously. Categories were white and black, male and female, and small city, small town, rural nonfarm and rural farm.

Neither sex nor residence altered the observed relationship. We did, however, observe some variation; whereas the mean aspiration score for the sample as a whole was higher in 1972 than in 1966, the reverse was true for white males. For five of the sixteen subgroups we also observed that mean aspiration scores were lower in 1966 than in 1972. Four of these five were white and three of the four were males.

Comparisons of aspirations and expectations as expressed in 1972 revealed significant differences. The aspiration score in 1972 of the sample as a whole was 54 percent of the theoretically possible high score (compared with 52 percent in 1966), but the expectation score in 1972 was 44 percent (compared with 48 percent in 1966). The spreads between scores for aspirations and expectations for 1966 and 1972 represent some interesting combinations. Aspirations increased during the six year period, suggesting decreasing realism; but expectations decreased, suggesting increasing realism. Although the increase in aspirations was not statistically significant, the decrease in expectations was large enough to move expectations significantly closer to attainment than aspirations.

When we controlled for sex we found that the original relationship did not hold for females. Their expectations were not significantly lower than their aspirations. It follows that the argument that aspirations and expectations are not identical does not hold for females. This statement is definsible on the basis of the statistical test, but the fact is that 1972 expectation scores for females when grouped according to race and residence were uniformly lower.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

In this report we focused on two questions: (1) do occupational aspirations and occupational expectations of youth reflect different levels of realism in the matter of occupational choice when compared with occupational attainment, and (2) do occupational aspirations and occupational expectations become more realistic through time.

Our analysis indicated that the first question should be answered in the negative. Although expectation scores were found to be uniformly lower than aspiration scores for eleven of sixteen subgroups examined in this report, the fact is that differences in 1966 were not statistically significant.

Analyses indicated that the answer to the second question should be both negative and affirmative; occupational aspirations did not change significantly from 1966 to 1972 (although the fact that they increased slightly might itself be viewed as a significant finding in light of the tenets of developmental theory), but occupational expectations for the sample as a whole did decrease, reflecting a significant move toward realism in the matter of occupational choice.

We did find some exceptions; for females the difference between 1972 aspirations and expectations was not statistically significant. The conclusion is that for females in our sample neither aspirations nor expectations became more realistic from 1966 to 1972.

How might those results that were contrary to what was expected be explained? With regard to the absence of any significant

difference between 1966 aspirations and expectations, the following occurred to us as a probable explanation:

Tenth grade students have limited knowledge about the world of work. Their primary reference groups at that stage of life are family and school peers, and for most of them the world of work - jobs, careers, etc. - evokes little thought. Their awareness, therefore, of job and career requirements and the various status allocating mechanisms of society that affect status attainment is limited.

With regard to the finding that aspirations did not change significantly through time, the following occurred to us as possible explanations:

1. The time frame of the study (a six year period beginning when our respondents were tenth grade students) might be restrictive, i.e. aspirations might decrease with the passage of time.

2. Aspirations might be a rationalizing device, i.e. high aspirations might persist through time as a means of rationalizing a relatively low status occupational achievement.

With regard to the fact that female expectations did not move closer to reality, the following is a possible explanation:

1. Females in our sample experienced less occupational goal deflection than males. Their occupational attainment score (1972) was 80 percent of their 1966 aspiration score; the comparative figure for males was 51 percent. For one group of females (white with small town residence) attainment actually exceeded aspirations.

   The relatively high level of occupational attainment of females is indicative of more realism on their part in the matter of occupational status projections.